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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 10 August 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United Nations presents it compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidacy of the Kingdom of Bahrain for election to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019–2021, at the elections to be held during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in New York.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, the Permanent Mission has the further honour to enclose herewith the pledges and commitments of the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain, reaffirming its commitment to the protection and promotion of all human rights (see annex).

In this regard, the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bahrain would be most grateful if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 117 (d) of the provisional agenda.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 10 August 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Bahrain to the Human Rights Council, 2019–2021

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights domestically and internationally. The Kingdom of Bahrain recognizes the important role of the Human Rights Council in this global effort. We believe that the Kingdom of Bahrain can bring a useful contribution to the work of the Council. Therefore, the Kingdom of Bahrain has decided to present its candidature for election to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019–2021 in the election to be held during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, in the fall of 2018.

2. Bahrain has witnessed political and legislative developments since 2002, the most prominent of which is the practice of citizens, both men and women, of their political and civil rights through participation in public affairs, including in the social, cultural and economic spheres, and by running for parliamentary and municipal elections; and the legislative authority's exercise of its constitutional right to oversee functions of the executive branch through its representatives in the Parliament.

3. The Constitution of Bahrain consists of the principles of equality, justice and freedom and considers them to be among the pillars of society. There is no discrimination between persons on account of gender, race, language, religion or creed.

4. The national legislation also reflects the respect for rights and freedoms. For instance, legislation guarantees human and social rights in the areas of: work and insurance against unemployment; protection of the rights of the child, older persons and women; combating trafficking in persons; care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities; protection from family violence; ensuring freedom of opinion, expression and belief; and ensuring the free and unrestricted exercise of religion and religious rights and practices in a framework of tolerance and mutual respect between the components of society with various religious, sectarian, cultural and ethnic affiliations. The national legislation also guarantees the freedom of civil society institutions through the formation of over 600 human rights associations covering various fields such as social, women's, religious and other issues.

5. Building on these achievements, the Kingdom of Bahrain makes the following voluntary pledges and commitments for the period 2019–2021:

Voluntary pledges and commitments

1. Rights of women

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue its efforts to play an international role and share best practices in promoting the empowerment of women and equal opportunities between men and women at the national and international levels

6. Bahraini women have obtained their full rights in the framework of equal opportunities and social justice in all fields in accordance with the Constitution and without prejudice to the provisions of the Islamic sharia. Under the aegis of the Head of State and with regard to women's political rights, Bahraini women have stepped up to executive positions and proved to be trustworthy equals. In 2001, the Head of

State appointed the first female Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Women, who became the first Bahraini woman to hold a ministerial ranked post across the Arabian Gulf region. In 2004, the first female cabinet minister was appointed as Minister of Health.

7. During the period from 2004 to 2017, the Government witnessed the appointment of a number of female cabinet ministers in fields such as social development, health, human rights, culture and information, where their performance was characterized by discipline and high productivity in the sectors that they occupied, reflecting thereby the level of competence that Bahraini women have in general. In 2017, Bahraini women held three ministerial positions. They also represented 8 per cent of the House of Representatives and 23 per cent of the Shura Council (appointed chamber of the legislative authority).

8. Moreover, the progress of Bahraini women at the international level is reflected in, inter alia, membership in international committees such as the Commission on the Status of Women, where the Kingdom of Bahrain was assigned by the League of Arab States to lead the negotiations on behalf of the 22 Arab States on the agreed conclusions of the sixty-first and sixty-second sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women of the Economic and Social Council; as well as the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the adoption and launch of the Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa Global Award for Women's Empowerment in March 2017, and the opening of the programme office of UN-Women in the Kingdom of Bahrain in the presence of the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-Women.

9. Furthermore, after years of consultation and study among all the components of society, the Kingdom of Bahrain succeeded in issuing the Family Law (Law No. 19 of 2017), in recognition of the importance of completing the legislative system of laws that support the stability of women and families. It includes comprehensive provisions, guaranteeing the Bahraini family all degrees of litigation to the courts of cassation in adjudicating family issues, and is seen as a reflection of national unity and social coherence in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

2. Rights of the child

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue its efforts to enact new legislation that will protect and guarantee the rights of the child and expand programmes based on the welfare and the social, health, psychological and educational rights of the child

10. The importance is recognized of promoting children's affairs, protecting their rights and ensuring a safe environment that allows for the full development of their abilities and talents and taking appropriate steps in the areas of health and education to take care of the psychological, social and cultural needs of children in accordance with the national strategy based on the best interests of the child. Training programmes have been established for teachers of various levels in public schools, and kindergarten teachers have been involved in a range of activities, workshops and training programmes to raise their professional competence for educational dealings with students in coordination with the relevant authorities. In addition to the establishment of a psychosocial counselling centre to care for the psychological and social guidance of students.

11. The Royal Charity Organization, established under a royal decree issued on 14 August 2001, sponsors orphans who have lost their parents. His Majesty the King holds the honorary presidency of the Organization and his son presides over the Board

of Trustees. The orphans are given the personal care of the King, which is to visit them and receive them on a regular basis in addition to sponsoring activities for them. The Organization provides educational support in the provision of school bags and the provision of free seats for orphans in kindergartens in cooperation with kindergartens, companies and private sector institutions, according to the number of seats obtained annually and the allocation of another free number of seats for orphans in private schools in cooperation with schools and companies and private sector institutions. In addition to taking into consideration their circumstances, the Organization provides people to assist them in preparing for final exams through educational institutions. After the completion of their studies, 50 seats will be reserved for those who get 80 per cent and above in public and private universities, as well as other seats supported by companies and private sector institutions.

12. Furthermore, a number of cultural initiatives have been launched, including an annual Ramadan competition called #Hashtag, which is a competition for children, aimed at raising children's awareness and enhancing their confidence. Other programmes were developed to raise health awareness and improve healthy lifestyles.

13. The Kingdom of Bahrain submitted its combined fourth to sixth periodic reports on the progress made in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva (September 2017).

3. Combating trafficking in persons

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will strengthen its national anti-trafficking strategies and support United Nations efforts as well as exchange best practices to combat trafficking in persons

14. Believing that the issue of trafficking in persons is a challenge that requires concerted national efforts to keep the Kingdom of Bahrain free from all types and manifestations of this global crime, and to address them and develop mechanisms to eliminate them in the event of indications of their existence, the Kingdom of Bahrain has taken a set of measures to ensure coordination and cooperation between the governmental parties and civil society to combat this crime within the visions and mechanisms contained in the national strategy to combat trafficking in persons.

15. In May 2017, the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, the first of its kind in the region, was launched. The system aims at strengthening measures to combat trafficking in persons, clarifying and regulating the role of different agencies and their mechanisms in dealing with any trafficking situation or suspected trafficking.

16. To assess the status of foreign victims of trafficking in persons, and in accordance with Ministerial Decree No. 4 of 2017, the National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons has been re-established and is currently chaired by the Labour Market Regulatory Authority. The Committee includes representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Public Prosecution, along with representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Committee examines all reports concerning victims, hears their statements or those of their legal representatives and removes any obstacles that may prevent foreign victims obtaining work if this is deemed necessary on the basis of what the Chair of the Committee has been told by the competent authority in this regard. It coordinates with the Ministry of the Interior to return victims to their country of nationality or their place of residence in any other State, if so requested, recommends whether it is appropriate for a victim to remain in Bahrain, adjusts their legal situation to enable them to work and refers this recommendation to

the Minister of the Interior for approval. If the recommendation is approved, it is subject to review under the same procedure at least every six months.

17. The Committee has opened a shelter for men and another for women who may have been exposed to trafficking in persons. The Ministry of Labour and Social Development is also building an integrated centre for victims of human trafficking with a capacity of more than 120 persons.

18. The Kingdom of Bahrain takes pride in its international achievement as the first Arab State to reach tier 1 in the *Trafficking in Persons Report* issued by the Department of State of the United States of America in June 2018.

4. Rights of persons with disabilities

Pledge:

- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue its efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and their integration into society***
- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to provide for the special technical and accessibility needs of persons with disabilities in all State enterprises and public places***

19. The Kingdom of Bahrain places great importance on the care of persons with disabilities, as it has gained further support and momentum in the framework of the comprehensive national reform project launched by His Majesty the King. All government institutions that have key roles in the rehabilitation process, institutions from the private sector and civil society and non-governmental organizations work in synergy, where roles are integrated in the form of a partnership system between all parties, to provide various types of care for persons with disabilities, including social, health and cultural care, as well as rehabilitation and training for their integration into society and the labour market.

20. The Kingdom of Bahrain works towards increasing the participation of people with disabilities in society and the economy. This is evident in the initiatives launched by the Kingdom aimed towards this goal, such as the adoption of a law requiring the issuance of a card to persons with disabilities with which a reduction of not less than 50 per cent of the fees imposed by the State shall be granted. The Danat project supports and nurtures small businesses for persons with disabilities. It consists of setting up kiosks in gardens, parks and vital areas in the provinces of the Kingdom in cooperation with the Coca-Cola Company and the Ministry of Municipalities and Agriculture, aiming at crystallizing the effective development role of the disabled and moving them from receiving care to having an active role of production and creativity.

21. The Sheik Nasser Bin Hamad creativity award for persons with disabilities is also an example of the steps taken by the Kingdom towards the inclusion of people with disabilities. The award displays the interest of the Kingdom in the creativity of persons with disabilities, highlighting their capacities and creativity, strengthening the competitive spirit among them as well as enhancing intellectual, artistic and scientific creativity and implementing this to deepen their development.

22. The Kingdom of Bahrain submitted its combined initial and second periodic reports on the progress of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Geneva (October 2017).

5. Religious tolerance and freedom of belief

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue its role in supporting initiatives to promote religious freedom and eliminate any incitement to sectarianism, violence, anti-nationalism, religious or racial hatred, as well as expanding its commitment to defend religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence at the international level

23. The Kingdom of Bahrain is a model of the coexistence and harmony between the followers of different religions, sects and cultures, thanks to the openness and freedom set by His Majesty the King within the framework of his comprehensive reform project. Many initiatives have been taken in this regard, including the launch of the Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration, which calls for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence throughout the world as a basis for promoting religious freedom, and the launch of the King Hamad Global Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence under the aegis of His Majesty the King, which is a significant historical impression recorded in the name of Bahrain, Arabs and Muslims.

24. The King Hamad Chair for Inter-Faith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence at Sapienza University of Rome was also established in November 2017 to teach dialogue, peace and interreligious understanding. This initiative will give young people from all over the world the chance to learn the noble values called for in the Kingdom of Bahrain, especially in the rapprochement between the religions and doctrines. It will also shed light on the actions taken by the Kingdom to establish these values in Bahraini society, in addition to teaching students values, ethics and tolerance among all.

6. Protection of workers' rights

Pledges:

- ***Under the laws and regulations of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom will maintain the rights of workers and monitor the relationship between the worker and the employer to ensure full compliance with the labour law in the private sector and ministerial decisions related to it, in accordance with the relevant international standards***
- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will publish its successful and pioneering practices in the field of reforming the labour market at the regional and international levels, namely the flexible work permit project for expatriate workers***

25. Bahrain is one of the leading countries in the field of labour market reform and the protection of workers' rights, namely through the flexible work permit project, which is considered one of the best international practices, in addition to granting expatriate workers the right to move from one employer to another without the consent of their previous employer according to the fair rules stipulated by law. The Kingdom also allows all workers to benefit from the system of insurance against unemployment without discrimination on the basis of their nationality to protect workers from destitution and need during periods of disruption. Foreign workers, the same as Bahraini workers, have the right to represent all workers in trade unions regardless of their nationality. They also have the right to strike and defend their legitimate interests, to undertake trade union activities and, as trade unionists, to be protected from dismissal because of their trade union activity.

26. The Kingdom was elected as a regular member of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in the government group for the period 2017–2020 in the elections held during the 106th session of the International Labour Conference in June 2017. This reflects Bahrain's growing international standing and confidence, as well

as the appreciation and recognition of member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for their outstanding efforts and achievements in the field of labour.

7. Cooperation with the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council and humanitarian organizations

Pledge:

- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will carry on its cooperation with international organizations concerned with humanitarian issues and United Nations human rights treaty bodies***
- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the specialized agencies of the United Nations with regard to meeting its training needs in the protection of human rights, building national capacity and raising public awareness as well as developing national plans to protect and promote human rights***
- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to strengthen human rights bodies in their preventive and protective activities, such as the National Institution for Human Rights, the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission, the Special Investigations Unit and the Ombudsman***

27. The Kingdom of Bahrain has continued to contribute financially to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as to other programmes, on an ongoing basis. Such contributions are intended to strengthen the work of the Office and the implementation of its programmes.

8. Sustainable Development Goals

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will take concrete steps to continue the national development process with the support of the Government's leading programmes to implement and raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals

28. Building on its experience in achieving the Millennium Development Goals before their target date of 2015, the Kingdom of Bahrain has taken several steps to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals. The Kingdom has paid great attention to these goals and has been strongly committed to achieving them since their endorsement in 2000. The Kingdom has achieved important steps, such as:

- Percentage of the population living in extreme poverty is zero.
- Average economic growth in the past decade stands at 37.4 per cent and average GDP per capita is US$ 22,000.
- Public expenditure on health, education and social protection exceeds 35 per cent of the budget.
- Basic education is free and compulsory. Net enrolment ratio for primary and secondary levels is 100 per cent and 86.4 per cent, respectively, thus eliminating illiteracy. KG2 enrolment is 82 per cent.
- Health care is free and universal. The maternal mortality ratio and the mortality rate for children aged under 5 years dropped to 28.6 deaths per 100,000 live births and 9 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively, compared with 226 deaths per 100,000 live births and 44 deaths per 1,000 live births worldwide.

- The Constitution guarantees gender equality. There are two committees instituted by the Supreme Council for Women to ensure equal opportunities and gender-responsive budgeting. Women hold 55 per cent of supervisory positions, with 53 per cent and 33 per cent participation in the public and private sector, respectively.
- The private sector is a key development partner. It provides equal high-paying employment opportunities, contributing to the lowering of total unemployment to 4 per cent.
- 65 per cent of the population has benefited from public housing services, with five new sustainable cities being developed.
- The coverage of safe water, sanitation and clean energy networks reached 100 per cent.
- The Labour Fund (Tamkeen) provides vast support to small and medium-sized enterprises. More than 47,000 small and medium-sized enterprises and 120,000 individuals, including women, youth and persons with disabilities have benefited from its financial and training support.

9. Follow-up of the universal periodic review

Pledge:

- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will ensure the implementation of the recommendations which were accepted during its third universal periodic review***
- ***The Kingdom of Bahrain will submit a voluntary midterm report on the progress that has been accomplished***

29. In March 2012, the Kingdom of Bahrain submitted to the Human Rights Council its second national report, which was adopted by the Council in May of the same year. In September 2012, Bahrain fully supported 145 recommendations, partially supported 13 and rejected 18 recommendations. In addition to this report, the Kingdom of Bahrain submitted a voluntary report in 2014 on progress made on applying the recommendations accepted in the framework of the universal periodic review.

30. The Kingdom of Bahrain submitted its third national report to the universal periodic review of human rights in February 2017. The report was published in various newspapers and through other media and on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Subsequently, Bahrain reviewed the report at the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 1 May 2017.

31. The Council adopted the outcome of the review of the Kingdom on 21 September 2017, and many delegates of the States participating in the thirty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva praised the position of the Kingdom of Bahrain on the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group on the third cycle of the review.

10. National policies and strategies

Pledge:

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to expand the scope of the various existing national strategies and plans aimed at guaranteeing, propagating, protecting and promoting human rights

32. Bahrain has drawn up several national plans and strategies that guarantee, assist, propagate and promote human rights at the national level, including those set out below.

Government Programme of Action 2015–2018

33. In the preparation of its work programme (2015–2018) entitled "Towards the justice, security and well-being of society", the Government of Bahrain adopted th principle of balance between the potential and resources of Bahrain, the challenges it faces, the requirements and needs of citizens and residents, continued development and construction and an emphasis on the sustainable development of the Kingdom, at the same time taking care to promote individual rights, freedom of opinion and expression and respect for human rights and to work within a framework of constitutional and legal legitimacy.

34. In that sense, it is also taking the steps necessary to complete its review of the laws and regulations in order to ensure their compliance with Bahrain's obligations under international and regional conventions and treaties to promote freedom of opinion and expression, individual rights and combat discrimination in all its forms.

35. Through the programme of action, the Government is endeavouring to bring about a society in which justice, security, stability and prosperity prevail, building upon previous achievements in a framework that ensures sustainable development and provides the necessary services to citizens, diversifies the national economic base, enhances competitiveness, develops an investment climate and strengthens the role of the private sector and human resources, as Bahrainis are the pivot, essence and engine of development.

36. The aims of the programme include the protection of the democratic political system and comprehensive development.

Economic Vision 2030

37. In October 2008, a comprehensive economic vision for the Kingdom of Bahrain was launched to give a clear direction to the continuing development of the Bahraini economy, which, in essence, reflects the fundamental common objective of building a better life for all Bahrainis. Economic Vision 2030 was launched after four years of intensive talks with a wide range of opinion leaders in the public and private sectors, including government institutions, specialized institutions, advisory institutions and global bodies. It focuses on the formulation of a vision of the Government, society and the economy based on the three essential guiding principles of sustainability, justice and competitiveness.

Government Forum 2017

38. A new national strategy was launched through the Government Forum 2017. The forum included a review of the Government Programme of Action 2015–2018, as well as the policies and procedures of various government bodies.

39. By addressing a series of critical areas and topics related to the Kingdom's growth, the Forum acts as an important platform for discussing the role of the public

sector in delivering the Kingdom's vision of comprehensive development led by His Majesty King Hamad.

40. The 2017 Forum built on the success of the 2016 Forum, which resulted in significant advancements, including increased government collaboration, improvements to public services, and the implementation of measures designed to boost productivity and address economic challenges.

41. The annual event reflects the Government of Bahrain's commitment to facilitating long-lasting development across a range of sectors in line with the principles of justice, competitiveness and sustainability that underpin Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030.

National Development Strategy 2015–2018

42. The National Development Strategy was prepared in connection with Economic Vision 2030 and is a road map for the national economy and government action. It focuses on consolidating the links between government policies and identifying the most important strategic initiatives to be implemented during this period.

43. Additional strategies include:

(a) National Childhood Strategy 2013–2016;

(b) National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2012–2016;

(c) National Strategy for Older Persons.

44. Policies and measures have also been introduced to encourage respect and protect human rights. These include:

(a) Establishment of the High Authority for Information and Communications under Royal Decree No. 47 of 2013;

(b) Launch by the Supreme Judicial Council of the "Future judges" project to train candidates for the judiciary in the capabilities and competencies needed by members of the judiciary.